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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER DRASKOVIC LAUNCHES SERBIAN BSEC
CHAIRMANSHIP

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On November 29, Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic formally launched the six-month Serbian BSEC Chairmanship with a speech to BSEC representatives, observers and related bodies. FM Draskovic's remarks were followed by brief comments by the BSEC Secretary-General and a short question period. In a departure from the norm, the meeting lasted less than an hour and was conflict-free. Most attendees - including FM Draskovic - also attended the opening event of the Papal visit to Istanbul at the Patriarchate later that afternoon, which almost certainly contributed to the speed and efficiency of the proceedings. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Draskovic began by noting the importance to the region of the NATO decision to admit Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Partnership for Peace. He emphasized that the decision will contribute to the stability and European perspective of the Western Balkans and South-Eastern Europe, a vital area for BSEC. He explained that parliamentary elections would take place in Serbia on January 21 precluding BSEC meetings in December and January. He noted his expectation that a new government would take office by the end of January.

¶3. (U) He described Serbian priorities for the next six months including an enhanced focus on the Danube and cooperation with international organizations. Serbia hopes a renewed emphasis on meetings that include sectoral experts as well as business leaders and World Bank officials in addition to diplomats will help re-orient BSEC to focus on concrete areas of cooperation including crime, the economy, the environment and culture. Serbia plans to build on the Russian Chairman's successful organization of meetings of Ministers of Transportation to broaden BSEC beyond its focus on international affairs and hopes to bring together the BSEC Ministers of Transportation, Communication and Culture to discuss projects relevant to their ministries with the goal of helping the people of the BSEC member states live better lives.

¶4. (SBU) BSEC Secretary General Leonidas Chrysanthopoulos

also underscored the importance of the Riga decision for the stability of the European area. He described two primary BSEC priorities: transportation projects and BSEC-EU interaction. Chrysanthopoulos expects BSEC Transportation Ministers to sign project documents for the Black Sea Ring Highway and Waterways of the Sea projects in February or March following the completion of internal ratification procedures. According to Chrysanthopoulos, every member state has initialed the proposals and most have completed internal procedures. He expects that the ministers will convene an informal meeting as an adjunct to the signing ceremony at BSEC's headquarters in Istanbul. Chrysanthopoulos described progress on BSEC-EU interaction, noting that the upcoming troika meeting should address this issue. He has met bilaterally with the Commission, Finland and Germany and hopes to be able to inaugurate an enhanced relationship with the EU at the Istanbul Summit in June 2007. BSEC currently has no mechanism to deal on an institutional basis with the EU; BSEC members must seek EU support on a bilateral basis. The enhanced relationship would provide a mechanism to work directly with the Commission on BSEC initiatives.

JONES